

# תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

SEFER BREISHIS - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

לע"נ ר' מנחם מענדל בן נחמן ע"ה ור' שלום בן שלמה הלוי ע"ה

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**Year 3 | Issue 9**

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# פרשת וישב

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER זT"ל

## The Beloved Zealot

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## Part I. Righteous Zealotry

### Yosef and His Brothers

וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת דְּבַרְתָּם וְרָעָה אֶל אָבִיהֶם – And Yosef brought the evil report about his brothers to their father (Vayeishev 37:2). That's one of the first things we learn in the Torah about Yosef Hatzadik – that he was always 'telling' on his brothers.

Now, the brothers were good brothers, no question about that. But you know that nobody is perfect – every human being sometimes does or says something wrong, and Yosef didn't overlook *anything*. The truth is that I don't even know if all of the things that Yosef said were factual. It could be he made mistakes – it could be it *looked like* they were doing something that wasn't so proper and he suspected them too quickly; could be. I can't tell you all the details, but what we do know is that he didn't hesitate. He ran and told his father everything.

## Yosef the Kana'i

Parshas Vayeishev is a remarkable story of a young man who was a *kana'i*, a zealot for the *d'var Hashem* who couldn't tolerate any improper conduct. And that means that whenever Yosef saw his brothers do anything that seemed to him improper, anything that needed improving, he didn't say, "It's none of my business." No; he was a *kana'i* and he brought it to his father's attention.

A *kana'i* is somebody who loves Hashem so much that he cannot remain silent when he sees something being done against His will. The Mesillas Yesharim (Perek 19) says that. When he speaks about the subject of *ahavas Hashem*, the *mitzvah* and the attitude of loving Hashem, he declares that one of the vital branches of this *avodah* is to be a *kana'i*, to be zealous for Hashem.

It's like a man who hears someone who is speaking unpleasant words about his father. You know, if you want to make trouble for yourself, a quick way to do that is to criticize a man's father. It's a sure way to upset him because he's loyal to his father and therefore he can't countenance people who speak against him or violate his will. He loves his father too much for that and therefore it bothers him very much; he becomes insulted, even incensed.

### Who Truly Loves Hashem?

And so, as we speak tonight it's important to keep in mind this definition of *kana'us* that the Mesillas Yesharim teaches us: A *kana'i* is somebody whom it hurts to see anything that contradicts the will of Hashem and he therefore acts with zeal and enthusiasm to defend the honor of Hashem. He speaks up to oppose the enemies of the Torah and to fight back against all the falsifiers.

And that's what the Torah is telling us here about Yosef Hatzadik. It's not what you learned in the *cheder*; Yosef wasn't just a little boy who was slandering his brothers. He was an *ohev Hashem*, and someone who loves Hashem will stand up for His will no matter what.

If you truly love Hashem then you just *can't* tolerate anybody who is an enemy of Hashem. Not only that you can't tolerate the atheists; that's certain – but you can't tolerate *any* infraction of the

words of Hashem. You can't stand people doing what's wrong because the one you love most, Hakodosh Boruch Hu, doesn't want it.

### **Yosef Gets Himself in Trouble**

And so when we study the story of Yosef, we understand that it's not just a saga of a careless boy – it's a case of a *kana'i*, a young man so in love with Hashem that he was willing to risk his life for the truth. Because you understand right away that Yosef's zeal did not gain him any favor with his brothers. He was making a lot of trouble for himself when he did these things and he understood very well there were going to be some dangerous results. Actually, we see that he almost lost his life as a result; the brothers wanted to get rid of him because of that. וְשֵׂתָה לְכוּ וְנִהְרְגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלְכֵהוּ בְּאֲחֹר הַבְּרוֹת – “Let's kill him,” said the brothers, “and throw his body into one of the pits in the wilderness” (ibid. 37:20).

Now, don't think the *shevatim* weren't people of great virtue. The brothers were good boys, very good boys. But when they saw a young man, especially a younger brother, who was so bold as to report faults to their father, they considered him a troublemaker, an upstart who was trying to gain favor with his father at their expense. Who knows what will happen someday? Before you know it, he'll be dreaming that he's the boss over us, that we'll be bowing down to him. He's dangerous and has to be stopped.

Nevertheless, Yosef didn't hold back and he continued to bring רַבְּתָם רָעָה אֶל אָבִיהֶם. He did what was commanded by his conscience – because he was full of zeal and so if something was wrong in his eyes, he went and told his father. That was *kana'us*!

### **Yosef Was Given Authority**

And when Yaakov Avinu saw that this son was defending the truth, that he was taking up for righteousness, וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בָּנָיו – so he loved him more than all the other sons, just because of that. The father saw that this son was a *kana'i* who was eager to uphold the truth of Hashem and וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים – He made for him a special garment, a royal garment to show that this is the one who has the authority in the family.

The younger brother should be given the privilege to wear a conspicuous garment of authority?! Yes! “If he’s the one who will take up for *kvod Shomayim*,” said Yaakov, “then his words should be listened to! And therefore, I’ll make him outstanding among his brothers by means of the *kesones passim*. People should know that Yosef is a man whose opinion carries weight.” The one who speaks up for what’s right and criticizes what’s wrong, that man is defending the *dvar Hashem* and he’s the one who should be clothed in a special garment of authority. “A man like that,” said Yaakov, “who tells the truth and sees to it that people should behave properly according to the *ratzon Hashem*, I want that man to be the leader.

Now, if you follow the career of Yosef, you’ll see that it wasn’t only his father who favored him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu Himself gave great authority to Yosef because of this quality of being a zealous defender of the Torah ideals. What did Hakodosh Boruch Hu say when He saw that Yosef was zealous for the *dvar Hashem*? Now, I wasn’t there at that time to hear, but I can imagine what He said: “If you’re that kind of man who will take up for me, then I’m going to make you a man of authority over your people. The time will come when everybody will be afraid of you and you’ll be able to say whatever you want.”

### **Hashem Raises Up the Zealot**

It’s a principle in the *hanhaga* of Hakodosh Boruch Hu in this world that the *kana'im* who are energetic in the defense of Hashem and His Torah are promoted to greatness. That’s what the *gemara* says, **כָּל אֲדָרָם שֵׁיִשׁ בּוֹ יִרְאֵת שְׁמַיִם דְּבַרְיוֹ נִשְׁמָעִין** – Anyone that has *yiras Shomayim*, his words are heard; they’re obeyed (Berachos 6b).

The *kana'im* for the truth, they’re the ones to whom the world should listen and therefore Hakodosh Boruch Hu elevates them in order to give more power to their efforts so that the zealot should have an effect on the people. **כָּל אֲדָרָם שֵׁיִשׁ עָלָיו חֵן בְּדוּעַ שְׁהוּא יִרְאֵת שְׁמַיִם** – When a person fears Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so He puts a *chein* upon his words in order that they should be accepted (Sukkah 49b).

Now you understand what Yosef’s dreams meant. **וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיךָ וַתִּלְאָמְתִּי** – When Yosef said, “I saw in my dream that your bundles were bowing down to my bundle,” it was a *remez min haShomayim* that

someday he would gain authority as the leader. It was a portent of what Hakodosh Boruch Hu desired – that everyone in the family should look up to Yosef the *kana'i* as the authority. He was one of the youngest but because of his eagerness to uphold righteousness in the family and his inability to rest when he saw something wrong, that's why Hashem wanted that the brothers should bow down to him.

### The Royal Edict

And that's why when the brothers finally came down to Mitzrayim, what did they discover? They found a decree, a royal edict from Pharaoh that was posted on the walls everywhere: בְּלִעְרֵיךְ בְּלֵא יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ וְאֶת רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם – *In this country nobody can even raise their hand or their foot without permission from Yosef* (Bereishis 41:44). And when the brothers saw that, they were afraid. It wasn't "Yosseleh, our little brother" anymore. It was Yosef, the regent king, the *Tzofnas Panei'ach*. And they knew he was the kind of person who wouldn't stand for any *avlos*. They had experience with him already; if he saw anything wrong, he took action.

And all that was only because וַיִּבֶא אֶת דְּבַרְתֶּם רָעָה אֶל אֲבִיהֶם; it was because he didn't remain silent when he saw something wrong. When you'll read next week that Pharaoh took off his ring and put it on Yosef's finger, you should remember that it was only because Hakodosh Boruch Hu saw that Yosef was someone who speaks up to defend the *emes*. All that power was given to him only because he was a *kana'i*, a man who took up for Hashem's words.

And what did Yosef do with this power? He became the first and the greatest king that ever reigned among the Jewish people. There was no *melech* who was as long in office as Yosef – he ruled over our nation for almost eighty years. The whole *klal Yisrael* was in Mitzrayim. וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד. There were millions already and they all obeyed one man, and that man was Yosef. And they were so afraid of him that every smallest thing that they did was according to his wishes as long as he was alive.

Don't make any mistake about it; those long years spent under Yosef's watchful eyes trained the people to be *medakdeik*, to be careful in the *kutzo shel yud*, in the smallest thing – because they

knew Yosef would react. They knew he wouldn't tolerate any deviation from what's right. That was Yosef's motto: אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יָרֵא – "I fear Elokim." It means, "More than anything else that I'm afraid of in this world, I'm afraid of Hashem." And he meant it.

And therefore, when the nation lived under Yosef, they were becoming prepared to live under the Torah that Hashem would later give. That's the real truth. The whole story of Yosef became the foundation of the history of the *Am Yisroel* because Hashem's nation can only survive if there are those who love Hashem enough to act with zeal and enthusiasm to defend His honor.

## *Part II. Chashmona'i Zealotry*

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### **The Revolt Breaks Out**

Now, when we go further in history, we find another person who became elevated; he and his children became great in our history because of their zealousness for the honor of Hashem. Everyone here knows that the story of Chanukah was due only to the *kana'us* of Matisyahu. What happened? In the town of Modi'in the Syrian-Greeks came and built an altar, a *mizbeyach* for *avodah zarah*. They wanted to bring an offering to their idol and all the Jews were told that they had to come and witness it. And because everyone was afraid for their lives, they came; they came and they kept quiet. Of course, they were angry. An idol in a Jewish town?! They were boiling with indignation – *but they didn't do anything!* They were afraid to open their mouths.

But the Greeks weren't satisfied with just that. They wanted a Jew to step forward and slaughter the offering to *avodah zarah*. And so, a Greek officer announced, "Who among you will step forward to slaughter the offering to the idol?" The Jews didn't move: nobody budged. Although they were afraid of the Greeks, nobody stepped forward.

And then, one Jew stepped forward. One wicked quisling Jew broke ranks and he offered to slaughter the offering. Now, when Matisyahu saw that, he couldn't stand still anymore. The fire of

kana'us, ignited by his *ahavas Hashem*, burst forth and he pulled out a sword from under his coat. He had prepared the sword for that purpose and he rushed forward and ran the sword through the heart of the *mumar*. And then he turned around and slew the gentile officer and he announced, "We're in revolt!" The die had been cast.

### **Matisyahu Becomes Great**

Now, in those days, it wasn't like today; today if you speak against the President you're considered a hero. You don't have to be a zealot to speak against the President today – every reckless liberal does it. Today you could even make a riot against the President and get away with it. But in the days of Matisyahu, a revolt against the king meant you were giving away your life.

And so Matisyahu ran away with his family to hide in the mountains; the rest of his life he spent in hiding, in the wilderness, coming out to fight off the Greeks, standing up for the *d'var Hashem*. And he died that way – hiding in the forests and living in the caves. Matisyahu died for Hakodosh Boruch Hu and it's because of him, because of the *middah* of *kana'us*, that the entire story of Chanukah is celebrated by the *Am Yisroel*.

Hashem made him and his family great forever and ever as a lesson to the *Am Yisroel*. To teach us what He desires from us; so we should know that it's the *kana'im* who find the most favor in His eyes.

### **How to Become a Zealot**

Now, it pays for us to study this important *middah* of *kana'us* because it's a subject that is misunderstood by many people. We quoted before from the *Mesillas Yesharim* that *kana'us* is an important branch of the *mitzvah di'oraisho* of *Ahavas Hashem*, a *mitzvah* that applies to everyone; men, women and children. And that means that *everyone* has to learn how to be a *kana'i*; and so it pays for us to take a little time to study what is it that makes a person love Hashem so much that he becomes a *kanai*.

In the *tefillah* of *al hanissim*, we say to Hashem the following words about our forefathers who fought the *Yevanim*: רָבַתְּ אֶת רִיבָם – You, Hashem, took up their quarrel – You fought their fight, רִנַּתְּ אֶת דִּינָם – You judged their judgment. It means that we are thanking Hashem

for taking up for them and for helping them gain victories in their battles.

But there's a big question here. Because actually it *wasn't* the quarrel of the *Am Yisroel*. The *Am Yisroel* weren't battling for themselves. You think anyone would have bothered Matisyahu if he wouldn't have spoken up for Hashem? He and the *Chashmona'im* could have continued living happily if they had kept quiet. Nobody wanted to persecute them; if they would have given up the observance of the Torah, nobody would have harmed them. After all, the Greeks weren't interested in killing Jews. They wanted the Jews to stop keeping the Torah, that's all; they were fighting against Hashem and against His Torah, not against the Jews.

Why did the *Chashmona'im* spend years hiding in the caves and battling the Greeks? They were fighting for their lives?! No! They were fighting to uphold *Your* Torah, Hashem! What were the battles about? They were battling for Hashem! So it wasn't **רַבְּתָּ אֶת רִיבָם**! It was **רַבְּתָּ אֶת רִיבֶךָ** – Hashem, You took up for *Your* own quarrel and You fought *Your* fight. So why do we thank Hashem for helping us in *our* battle?

And the answer to that question is really the foundation of what *kana'us* is. Because what did Matisyahu say? Did he believe that he was fighting only Hashem's fight? No! He said, "It's *my* quarrel! Anything that's against Hashem is against me!" The *Chashmona'im* loved Hashem so much that His ideals became their ideals! Hashem's fight is our fight! That's why it says **רַבְּתָּ אֶת רִיבָם** – "You, Hashem, fought *their* fight!" Because the *Chashmona'im* took up for the Torah like it was their own business.

### Whose Torah Is It?

And that's why it says in the beginning of *Tehillim*: **אֲשֶׁרֵי הָאִישׁ לֹא הִלְךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים** – *How fortunate is the man who doesn't walk in the way of the resha'im*, **כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם הִפְצוּ** – *his desire, his delight is only in the toras Hashem*. And then it goes on and says, **וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה וּלְיָמָה וּלְלַיְלָה** – *and in his Torah he ponders by day and by night*. First it's called **תוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם**, Hashem's Torah, and subsequently it's called **תוֹרָתוֹ** – *his own Torah*.

So the *gemara* (Avodah Zarah 19a) says like this: When you learn Torah, so at first it's the *Toras Hashem*, it's Hashem's business. When you hear what the *mishnah* says, alright, the *mishnah* is saying it. Of course, you're a *frum* Jew so you'll study Hashem's words and you'll keep them too, absolutely. But still it's the *Toras Hashem* – only that you're good enough to keep His Torah.

But then what happens? After a while it begins to become *toraso*, your own Torah. What does that mean your Torah? It's like this: The more you think about *torah* ideals and *torah* attitudes, after a while, they become your own ideals and attitudes. After a while, when you put effort into creating a Torah mind, so you become so imbued, so saturated with Hashem's *torah* that it becomes your *mishnah*, your *torah* – you want to carry it out. "It's my *torah*!"

### **Making His Will Yours**

That's what we learn in *Pirkei Avos*: עֲשֵׂה רְצוֹנוֹ כְּרְצוֹנְךָ – *Make the will of Hashem your will* (Avos 2:4). It means, make Hashem's will that it should become your will. What Hashem wants, that's what you should want!

So everybody says, "Certainly! Certainly, I accept that. What's so great about that?" The answer is, it's very great. If you can reach the *madreigah* that what Hashem wants is what you want, then you're already a very important personality. That's what Yeshaya Hanavi said, וּבְחָרוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר הִפְצֵיתִי – *They'll choose that which I, Hashem, desire* (56:4). It doesn't say, they'll do what I desire; it says they'll choose what I desire. "Just because I, Hashem, desire it, they desire it."

"Ooh," Hashem said. "These people consider My desire as their desire. Just because they know that I want the Torah to be observed, that's why they fight for it. Ooh, *wha!* That's My people!" That's a tremendous achievement! Not only that we're doing Hashem's will, but it's *our* will! כִּי הֵם חַיֵּינוּ – *The Torah is our lifeblood!* It's what we live for and that's why we'll give our lives for the Torah.

The *Chashmona'im* weren't merely fighting for the Torah. It was *toraso!* What Hashem wanted, became what they wanted. "And if that's the case," said Hashem, "so I'll give them miraculous victories." רְבִימִים בְּיַד מְעֻטִּים – A small band of people who weren't well armed, and

weren't well trained, were able to overcome a large standing army of a powerful monarch because Hashem said, "The ones who take up for My honor, *they're* the one I'm going to honor."

### **Taking Responsibility**

The *gemara* (Eiruvin 3a) says, **קִדְרָה דְּבֵי שְׁתַּפֵּי לָא חַמֵּיקָא וְלָא קָרִירָא** – A pot that belongs to partners, it's never hot and never cold. It's always lukewarm because each partner says, "Let the other one do it." It means that anything belonging to partners never has the full success. If it's yours and a partner's, so each one relies on his partner to do it. But when a man is a sole owner of that pot, so he sees to it that the pot should be boiling all the time. It's *his* pot, so it becomes *his* responsibility.

Therefore, when a man becomes a *kana'i* for the *dvar Hashem*, it's not a *bei shutfei* – he doesn't shift off the responsibilities to others because now it's his own. You're not fighting for *Toras Hashem*, for an abstract ideal. You're fighting for *your Torah*. It's **רַבְתָּ אֶת רִיבָם**. It becomes your own private business.

Not that you have your own business and you're a *frum Jew* so you try to do Hashem's business too. No; Hashem's business, that's your private business! Like Yosef Hatzaddik – he felt it was *his* business when he saw something wrong. When he saw his brothers acting improperly, it wasn't only the business of Hashem – it was *his* business. When Mattisyahu saw that *mumar* step up to slaughter to the *avodah zarah*, he felt that it was his private business that this weakling was trampling on. "It's *my* fight!"

## *Part III. Practical Zealotry*

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### **The Gedolim Spoke Up**

And what that means is that in this world, if you love Hashem then you're supposed to have a big mouth; you must speak up. And even though you won't be so popular – people don't like those who make a fuss – but you can be sure that Hakodosh Boruch Hu *does* like you. Hashem loves the *kana'im* because they love Him.

The real *chachomim* always speak up. I was present once at a certain gathering and Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky spoke up against Bar-Ilan University. Rav Yaakov knew that Bar-Ilan is a rotten place, and that if it would close down the world would be much better off, and so he spoke up. And even though he knew that there were present in the audience big supporters of that place, he didn't hold back. One wealthy man who was there, an important fellow, had the *chutzpah* to speak up and contradict Rav Yaakov, but he didn't budge; he didn't back down. He felt it was an important issue so he opened his mouth.

Reb Aharon Kotler z"l gained a number of enemies because he was outspoken. The old *Satmerer Rebbe* also gained enemies because he spoke up for Hakodosh Boruch Hu. To shout out the truth requires not only conviction but it requires courage as well. There are a lot of people who believe in certain principles but they don't want to put themselves out – they don't have the level of *ahavas Hashem* needed to fight for these principles. Look, sometimes it can be quite uncomfortable; people are not in the mood to expose themselves to public opprobrium. And yet, the *ohavei Hashem* do it.

### **There's Much We Can Do**

But it's important to understand that *kana'us* is not only for the *gedolim* – every *frum* Jew should be developing a love for Hashem, a love so strong, that he or she feels a desire to stand up for the honor of Hashem! It's a pity that the Orthodox *tzibbur* is like dead lumber and doesn't do it. Everybody here should feel it's their duty, that they must take action when public issues are concerned. You could be a *yeshiva* man, or a *chossid*, a housewife, or an old woman – it makes no difference; it's *your* Torah!

Suppose each one of us felt that the Torah is *his* Torah, that the words of Hashem are *his* words! So we'd feel that it's our duty to stand up and say something. Every one here should feel it's his duty to write a letter to Mayor Koch to protest the *to'eivahs* that he wants to bring to New York City. You don't have to be a big author, a poet or a literary man to write letters. If you're a strong fellow you can tell him off! "Mayor Koch, we are disgusted with you! We're terribly sorry you were elected." If you're more of a soft fellow, so you can write one line: "We are disappointed with you. We disagree with you."

There are a lot of things to do. We have to write letters to the State Board of Education protesting against the filth and *sheker* they're teaching in the schools. They're spoiling the youth with the wickedness that they're promoting in the school and we have to speak up about that.

### **A Career at the Post Office**

And don't do it once. All it costs is thirteen cents and a piece of stationary. Do it once, and then next week write again. Make sure to write a few times – that's the least you can do! Letter writing should be a career of yours; it takes up less than ten minutes a week.

You people here, it's *your* job! You'll say, "Me? I'm a *yeshiva* man." What about it?! A *yeshiva* man doesn't take time off to look in the paper? A *yeshiva* man wastes plenty of time *bein hasedorim*; so sneak out *bein hasedorim* and walk into the bathroom and write a short nasty letter to Mayor Koch. Leave out the *beis hei*, or the *beis samech daled*, and write a letter saying you're against his policies that are destroying our city. And paste on a thirteen cent stamp and you know you did something. At least *something* like Yosef Hatzadik and Matisyahu *Chashmona'i*, you're doing. It doesn't mean you're a goy. Some people think you're a goy if you do things like that – they think that to be a real Jew means that you should have no interest in anything that takes place. Foolishness!

You can write letters to Governor Carey – a big fool he is, a big snob. He just can't bear that there should be capital punishment restored in New York State. He can't bear it because those voters who come from criminal elements, they're against capital punishments, you know. So he can't bear to lose those votes.

So you have to write letters to the Governor telling him that you want to see the electric chair running again. Twenty four hours a day it should be working. Write to your state senators, to the legislators, letting them know that you want capital punishment restored. By all means you should do that. We have a petition sitting here on the *bimah*, on the table – you should come here and sign it. Ladies also should sign these petitions. Write legibly and put your address and your phone number on it. Some people are lazy to do even that. It's the least you can do if you're a *frum* Jew.

If you see something wrong in the city, or in the state or even in the country, write! Write again and again. Every week hammer away; they can't do a thing to you. They can't put you in prison for that. Hammer away!

### **Boom Boom Boom**

Now, we still have to talk about one more important aspect of this subject. And it's a point that you must understand well – otherwise you might miss the subject entirely. What is the purpose of *kana'us*? Is it to smash your enemy? Is it to destroy him? No. The purpose is that the word of Hashem should be upheld. That's the purpose of *kana'us*.

So suppose you can conquer your enemy by being *mashpia* on him that he should become a *frum* Jew. Take the reform rabbi for example. A reform rabbi is your enemy; he, or maybe she, doesn't believe in the Torah, he doesn't even believe in Hashem. He believes in everything wicked. Rabbi Susan, Rabbi Nancy, it's as wicked as could be. Reform rabbis are very dirty people and they're influencing others to be wicked. So they are our enemies, no question about it.

And therefore, if we could press a button and explode them, it seems to us that it would be the best thing to do. Press a button right now, explode them. Over here, over there, a thousand explosions. Boom, boom, boom.

### **The Better Way**

But maybe there's a better way of being a *kana'i*. Maybe you can influence people. You can buy the right books and mail it to them. After all, they're ignorant people. They don't know anything. They never came into contact with real Torah ideals. There are a lot of inspiring things you can send them. Today there are so many good things written in English that might change them. Maybe you can get subscriptions to *frum* Jewish newspapers, *frum* Jewish magazines and send it to them. It'll cost you money, but every week they'd get it. They'd take a look at it – they probably won't ignore it altogether. It has some bit of *hashpa'ah* on them; they might change. Maybe that's a better way of *kana'us*.

We had a man in our *kehilla* who went and bought from 770 Eastern Parkway a stack of old copies of Talks and Tales – it's a children's *frum* magazine and he sent it out to the entire neighborhood. Look at all these big apartment houses – there are so many ignorant Jews who live there. Even the Jewish Press will be to them like a fanatic newspaper. So send Talks and Tales to these apartment houses. What does it cost you already?

You never even tried it even once?! No, no; that's not a *kana'i*. Right away you want to press a button and explode them?! A real *kana'i* tries other ways first.

### **Adopt an Apartment House**

If we would feel that it is *our* duty, that it's *our* Torah we're defending, we'd be able to accomplish a lot. There's so much literature that's available. Why don't you adopt an apartment house? Adopt a big apartment house on Ocean Parkway or a big apartment house on Ocean Avenue; say "This house is mine – this is my project."

Find out who lives there. How do you find out? You can walk through the building writing down the names until the janitor throws you out. Give him \$10 and he'll let you stay for another hour. Or you can go into the real estate places and they have directories; house by house, apartment by apartment. I once did it to one apartment house; I had a name of everybody in the apartment house. Adopt it; make it your project and send letters to them. Send printed information to them. If you can't afford it all at once so do it little by little. There's a lot of work to be done.

### **Flyer Distribution**

The true *kana'us* is when you try to spread *Yiddishkeit* in the world – a true *kana'i* want to make the name of Hashem great in this world. I saw a *frum* Jew with a big beard not long ago, a big *talmid chacham*, handing out fliers on the street. The flyers were saying that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will help you if you try to be a real Jew. Other flyers showed how you can see Hashem all around you in nature. And he was telling arguments why you should be a *ma'amin*. He wasn't slapping people in the face as they're passing by. He wasn't

hitting people with a club! He was talking to ignorant people about Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

There are so many ways that we could be *kana'im*. Print up flyers saying, “Don’t Shop on Shabbos Please,” and hand them out every Wednesday. How much does that cost already? We did that in East Flatbush. Before we moved the shul here we used to do that. In the tens of thousands we distributed flyers about Hakodosh Boruch Hu, about Shabbos. We called it The Traditional Observance Organization. We had big propaganda coming out of our little shul.

If you would hand out leaflets, “Send your child to a yeshiva instead of the public school,” so nobody’s going to haul off and hit you. They won’t even insult you. Why can’t you do that? I was watching the Lubavitcher handing out leaflets on Kings Highway near the subway. Most people ignored them, they disdained it; but if somebody was nice enough to take it they ran after that man or woman and they started talking to them – they walked down the block talking to them. And the person was reluctantly listening over his shoulder while this Jew was pouring out his propaganda. Sometimes they got a customer who was willing to listen. That’s the way to be! There are a lot of things to do for our fellow Jews.

### **Winning Over the Enemy**

So now we’re learning a new *pshat* in *kana'us*. *Kana'us* means winning the battle for Hashem. And in general, if you have an enemy, the greatest victory you can have is if you win him over to your side. Instead of punching the enemy in the nose and making him fall down in a faint, if you can say a few kind words and win him over to you, then you’re victorious.

Like it says, **אם רעב שׁנְאָדָּה** – *If your enemy is hungry*, **הַאֲכִילֵהוּ לֶחֶם** – *feed him bread*, **וְאִם צָמֵא** – *if he’s thirsty*, **הַשְׁקֵהוּ מַיִם** – *give him water to drink* (Mishlei 25:21). Now, is that the way to deal with an enemy?! To give him bread and water? So the *possuk* says, yes; **כִּי גְהָלִים אֶתְהָה** – *You’re shoveling burning hot coals on his head* (ibid. 22). You hear that? That’s a wonderful thing, if you can shovel burning hot coals on the head of your enemies. We have plenty of enemies and if we could take shovels of burning hot coals and put it on their

heads, it would be *ta'anug*, a *ta'anug gamur* – a great pleasure. No question.

But with our fellow Jews, there are other ways of doing it, better ways. You can shovel hot coals of being nice to them and kindly to them and polite to them; being *mashpia* on them. If you win them over, then that's shoveling hot coals on them – it means, that's the biggest success you can have. The real success of a *kana'i* is if you can change your enemy and make him to be a friend of Hashem, an *oheiv Torah*.

### **Aharon and Pinchas**

Now, I know some *kana'im* don't like that. They don't like that idea. They think it's only *milchama* – making war is the only way! No, no, that's not a *kana'i* – it's just a hothead. Everyone knows the story of the great *kana'i*, Pinchas. Believe me, if Pinchas could have walked out to Zimri and said, "Zimri, my boy; what are you doing to yourself?" If he could have caressed him and said, "Zimri, go back home – forget about it; put the *shiksah* away and forget about it altogether" and Zimri would have listened to him, it would have been the best thing. Only that Pinchas knew that Zimri wouldn't listen to him. He was already *farkocht*, and so the only way to deal with Zimri was to jab a spear in his belly. That's the only way sometimes.

But if he could have gotten into his mind, if he could have influenced him, it would have been the very best thing. I'm sure he would have done it. Only that Hakodosh Boruch Hu created these circumstances to serve as a model for what you have to do sometimes when it's very unpopular – you have to defend His honor even when it's not easy to do. But the true model of what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants is Aharon Hakohen.

I'm going to tell you a little secret. Aharon Hakohen was a bigger *kana'i* than Pinchas! Now, Aharon Hakohen never killed anybody. Aharon Hakohen was *doiresh shalom*. He spoke peace to everybody. He was אֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה – *He loved mankind and that's how he brought them closer to the Torah*. He was a real *kana'i*! Pinchas was a very great man, no question about it, but Aharon Hakohen accomplished more than Pinchas. He took people in and he was *mekarvun laTorah*. That's also a way to take up for Hashem.

## **Yosef, Matisyahu and You**

And so, we begin to understand now that the function of being a *kana'i* is not merely to be angry and to tread down upon your enemies to destroy them. The function is so that the *dvar Hashem* should conquer the world. And if you can cause the word of Hashem to be victorious by other means, then that's the true sign of the *kana'i*.

*Kana'us* is a way to greatness. That's why Yosef and Matisyahu became great in this world and more importantly how they became great in the eyes of Hashem. And that's one of the important ways that we too can find favor in His eyes.

*Kana'us* that comes from love of Hashem is a great perfection of character. Of course, it has to come from that – a love of Hashem. Sometimes, people are *kana'im* not because they love Hashem, but for their personal motivations. But when a person takes up for the honor of Hakodosh Boruch Hu because they love Hakodosh Boruch Hu – and there are no lack of ways to do that – then that person has chosen a way in life that leads them to greatness in this world, and to greatness in the World to Come forever and ever.

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# A VORT ON THE PARSHA

## Vayeishev

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ

And Yisroel loved Yosef more than all his other sons, for he was a son of his old age.

Yosef was born after Yaakov and Rochel had already been married to each other for many years and they had both despaired of ever having children together. It was only then, after years of hope and despair, that Yaakov finally had his first child with Rochel – “a son of his old age.”

This was the plan of Hashem, as in many similar instances, whereby He causes hope to be almost entirely lost, and only then does He demonstrate His hand in history by coming to the rescue. The fact that Yosef was the *ben zekunim*, the one born to an elderly Yaakov as a result of this great and unexpected deliverance by Hashem, helped Yaakov achieve an even stronger *bitachon* in the hand of Hashem in history. And that was something that Yaakov was always reminded of when he saw Yosef, and it played a role in causing Yaakov’s especial love for his *ben zekunim*.

וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלְתָיו

And Yaakov tore his garments

The practice of tearing one’s garments upon the death of a relative that is mentioned here is an example of many Torah-procedures that were followed by our *Avos*, long before the *chachomim* made them obligatory upon the Am Yisroel.

But we should note the fact that this ritual of *kriyah* is declared to be a *mitzvah d’rabanan*, a Rabbinical decree, in our *halacha* corpus, despite the fact that this practice is here openly mentioned in the Torah.

Had the *chachomim* wanted to authenticate this practice as an original Torah law, a *mitzvah di’oraiso*, they could have cited this verse as incontrovertible evidence of that fact. And yet, the *chachomim* didn’t

do that because the status of all Jewish laws are based solely on the criterion of truthfulness. The national tradition, the *mesorah*, declares the *mitzvah* of *kriyah* to be obligatory solely by Rabbinical decree. And therefore, when reading this *possuk*, besides for all the other lessons that one may glean, it pays to remind ourselves that one important lesson we learn is the eternal truthfulness of the words of *Chazal* in their transmission of our *mesorah*.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חֲטָאוּ מִשְׁקָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְהָאֶפֶה לְאֹרְנֵיהֶם  
And it was after these matters (of Yosef being imprisoned) that the  
cupbearer and the baker of Pharaoh sinned against him

“After these matters” would seem to be superfluous words if they refer merely to chronologic order, because usually all the events of a single narrative are narrated in their proper sequence.

And so we’ll understand as follows: “After these matters,” means, “As a result of the foregoing – Yosef’s imprisonment – Hashem caused the following to happen.” Because Yosef was languishing in prison and needed to be rescued for the sake of the future of the *Am Yisroel*, therefore Hashem caused all of these events to happen in the palace of the king – Hakodosh Boruch Hu sent a fly on a mission right into the *becher* of Pharaoh and He dropped a pebble into Pharaoh’s favorite pastry and now the palace cupbearer and baker both found themselves in very hot water. Of course, Pharaoh could have been lenient with his loyal court ministers, but Hashem had other plans and He caused Pharaoh to be furious and to imprison them – in the same prison where Yosef was jailed!

Of course, if we had been in the palace at this time, it wouldn’t have occurred to us that this big uproar had been concocted for the benefit of an obscure prisoner in the dungeon. It was just an errant fly who made a wrong turn and a pebble that squeezed its way through the sifter. And it was just a Pharaoh who woke up on the wrong side of the bed and became furious. So what of it?

And therefore the Torah tells us, that “it was after these matters” of Yosef’s imprisonment, that the story of the palace furor took place – because they were directly related. It all happened *just because* Yosef was in prison. “He is Hashem, our G-d, in all the earth are His judgements” (Tehillim 105:7). Because He is our G-d, therefore whatever transpires in His world are His judgements on our behalf. *Whatever transpires in the palaces of the gentiles is being done by Hashem for His people!* Hashem manipulated the palace-dwellers in order to elevate Yosef and thereby prepare the children of Yaakov for their sojourn in *Mitzrayim* where they developed into the *Am Yisroel*, Hashem’s eternal nation.

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# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**Should parents buy gifts for their children on Chanukah?**

A:

There's no harm, but you have to be careful that it shouldn't enter into the realm of the season's holiday spirit. It shouldn't be done because of the general atmosphere of the street, because they're doing something like that. You have to beware of that attitude.

So, I would say that to give cash is a much better idea. Chanukah gelt is a well-known minhag, so give cash if you can. I don't say it's wrong to give gifts; nothing wrong with giving gifts. But make sure, in your own mind at least, that you're divorced from any thoughts of the season.

Chanukah is not the season to give gifts, no, no. It's not the gift-giving season. You can give gifts anytime. You can give gifts on Shavuot too, and on Purim and Pesach. And if you want to give gifts on Chanukah as well, I'm not going to tell you no. But if you're going to make a big fuss about it, and make it into an ideal that Chanukah is the time to give gifts, then you might as well sing carols and put up a Chanukah tree, because that's what it really is.

[TAPE # E-170 (December 1998)]

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